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ABSTRACT

It is pointed out that establishing classroom environments enabling students to actively engage in cross-cultural interaction and communication is essential to the success of a culturally pluralistic society. In this examination of an effective multicultural teacher education program it is implied that each institution has the responsibility for retraining faculty in attitudes conducive to cultural integration. Using the Italian American as an example of an ethnic group, five typical negative means of stereotyping are identified: (1) occupation class; (2) custom, religion, and politics; (3) "natural" inclinations; (4) illiteracy, crime, and delinquency within geographical areas; and (5) derogatory characterization. A single course on ethnic culture presented by a member of that particular ethnic group is regarded as limited and nonproductive; instead, an integrative approach is suggested for a complete multicultural curriculum. Each course in such a curriculum could be modified to include multicultural elements. Such considerations as the contributions by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, religious, or political affiliations, and persons with divergent personal characteristics or preferences would enrich such a curriculum and provide a wholesome culturally pluralistic environment. (JD)

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Multicultural Education:

Where Do We Go From Here?

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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by

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When I was asked to speak at a recent conference dealing with multi-cultural pluralism, I began to reflect upon my experiences to try to determine if I could recall the point at which I first felt the impact of the scope of cultural diversity. I was able to trace it at least as far back as my pre-teen years. One day, when I was twelve years old, the mother of two of my friends interrupted us at play and asked if we would be interested in driving with her to Cambridge to see the glass flowers. We looked at each other as if to say "What's so great about flowers?" Further, "What's so great about glass flowers when you can see real ones?" She seemed very excited about the prospect of going to the Harvard Peabody Museum and that excitement was transferred to us (with more than a little help from summertime boredom).

When we arrived at the Museum we were confronted by a maze of three and four-story Victorian brick buildings tacked one against the other and proceeded to find our way to the glass flowers. It took us no time to breeze through the exhibit, for, at that youthful age we didn't appreciate the hundreds of works of art that those unique productions represented. We wandered through the many exhibition rooms and passageways; through the geological collections, the zoological collections, and finally to the anthropological collections. It was, indeed, like being in another world! Display case upon display case was filled with paraphernalia from distant lands. Clothing, weapons, cooking implements, costumes and regalia, jewelry, dug-out canoes from remote Pacific islands, masks made from the skin of human faces stretched over small wooden hoops, unwrapped mummies, severed heads and limbs of gorillas and proboscis monkeys, and myriad fascinating artifacts. A twelve year old's delight!

We had found a virtual paradise! A place whose wonders we couldn't exhaust if we were to spend countless afternoons fantasizing about life in the exotic countries represented there.

This serendipitous discovery led to many hours spent as a teenager and as a college student at the museum. I brought my students there as a teacher and as soon as my own children were old enough we drove from Maine to introduce them to its collections. I considered it an investment in my students' and my children's future. The wonder and fascination for the Harvard Museum (especially the archaeological and anthropological sections) remains with me even after twenty-five years have passed.

However, there is no similar resource available to most people throughout the United States. And, where such resources do exist, they are woefully underpatronized. How then, do we begin to foster multicultural sensitivity?

I grew up in a bi-cultural setting. There were Italian-Americans and non-Italian-Americans. As a youngster I was oblivious to the fact that subgroups of Chinese, Lithuanian, Greek, Polish, Spanish, Irish, English, and Black Americans comprised this group of non-Italian-Americans who lived within a few scant miles of my neighborhood.

Insularity, in this case, was more a matter of perceptual rather than geographical bounds. There was a culturally diverse presence that had totally eluded me until I chanced upon the Museum which served as a mind-expanding catalyst.

As a result of the conference topic I was to address, I was confronted by two obvious questions: Is there a culturally pluralistic presence in my state? And further, is there a culturally pluralistic presence at my employing institution? And if so, will that in itself dispel any insularity that may exist? I dare say, it will not. In my judgment, we in higher education are in

need of a catalyst. That catalyst, I believe, can be an institution's curriculum brought to life through the interaction of committed faculty members and receptive students.

The answer to the question "Is there a culturally pluralistic presence in my particular state?" is "yes". The total enrollment for all institutions of higher learning is approximately 64,600 full time students (not including foreign nationals). Of this number, 181 or .3 percent are American Indian, 2,418 or 4 percent are Black Americans, 290 or .5 percent are Asian Americans and 827 or 1.3 percent are Hispanic Americans. In higher education, my state's minority enrollment is approximately 6 percent.

The answer to the question "Is there a culturally pluralistic presence at my particular institution?", again is "yes". There are on the faculty and in the student body representatives from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Foreign students currently enrolled represent the countries of Nigeria, Iran, Kenya, France, China, Panama, Mexico, Palau of the Western Caroline Islands, Sri Lanka, and Japan.

However, to reiterate, mere presence, I believe, is not enough. This notion is borne out by the recent statement of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education regarding standards on multicultural education. The language used in this multicultural standard indicates that the authors base their work on several assumptions:

1) Education, as it applies to formal learning experiences provided in schools, does not adequately prepare individuals to function effectively in a culturally diverse society.
2) Society in the United States is pluralistic in character and this pluralism will become an increasingly important factor in the future development of the nation.
3) Educators and educational institutions play an important role in shaping social behavior and must assume a principal responsibility for leadership in the development of a multicultural society.
4) The monitoring and assessment of the educational enterprise is not complete unless educators and educational institutions are evaluated with respect to providing educational experiences consistent with the concept of multicultural education.[1]

If it is true, as some educators believe, that cultural differences, like psychological differences, do influence learning then multicultural education should be seen as ". . . a process of bringing together cultural and psychological differences to enhance each individual's learning environment."[2]

Persons believing that multicultural education is synonymous with special programs for minorities and women appear to be at odds with the NCATE Standard's Preamble which implies that the focus is not on the creation and perpetuation of distinct cultural sub-units.

If the path to multicultural sensitivity is through the development of a specific course, I offer the following caveats: At the very least, another course added to our present curricular structure makes it that much more difficult for a teacher education student to graduate in the traditional four-year time period.

The political ramifications of the one-course approach were succinctly stated by Herbert London in a recent paper:

> The proliferation of disciplines, subspecialties, and new courses along with ubiquitous fiscal retrenchment in higher education has made it virtually impossible to establish any system of genuine academic priorities. The reigning opinion in academic life is that one discipline is as valuable as another, so long as it leads to personal survival.[3]

It is painfully obvious that the addition of such a required course will greatly enhance the student-credit-hour production of the department through which it is taught thus exacerbating problems relating to "departmental sovereignty" or "turf-protecting" which may already exist.

Also, it is often assumed that multicultural courses are more credible if they are taught by a minority faculty member. The following personal experience leads me to conclude that this assumed credibility is unfounded.

A number of years ago, a team (including myself) of Italian-American professors representing various colleges in the State of Maine received a grant from the National Endowment of the Humanities. The grant was to sponsor an ethnic heritage series focused upon the contribution of Italian-Americans to the State of Maine. The task came to me to gather as much historical evidence as possible on the subject. As a result of a preliminary review of the literature it became obvious to me that although the Italian-American in Maine had a very rich folk history there was very little recorded evidence in existence. At the outset of the project, I had assumed that because of my genetic heraldry and my concommitant sensitivity to the ethnic group under discussion, it would be very easy to deal with the subject at hand. I was profoundly mistaken. I found that being an Italian-American and teaching the Italian-American experience were not necessarily interdependent.

Actually, I learned more about my own ethnic group as a result of my research than I thought possible. For, although affective considerations are of great importance, the importance of a significant research effort on the part of the instructor toward producing accurate content and logical course structure should not be underestimated.

Singular Course Approach

If the single-course approach is used to satisfy the requirements for a multicultural curricular component, a logical approach toward developing course content might be through the examination of common stereotypic categories.

For example, I found that citations of a negative nature in the literature with reference to Italian-Americans and many other ethnic groups and races

could be categorized in only five ways.

Occupation Class Stereotyping: In this case members of certain ethnic groups were perceived as being most comfortable within, or most easily identified with a particular occupation role. For example, Wittke stated:

> Popular writers have loved to point out that America was discovered by a "wop" and named after another! Much more important, however, is what the millions of swarthy, picturesquely dressed peasants from sunny Italy who poured into the United States after 1880 did to build American railways, subways, roads, and sewers as gang laborers, and what they and their children have been able to accomplish in America as they rise in the social and economic scale, because of opportunities which few would have enjoyed at home.[3]

Stereotyping by Custom, Religious or Political Affiliation: Misunderstood ethnic traditions and religious or political practices served as a broad and fertile basis for the promulgation of ethnic bias or racial discrimination.

It seemed that certain acts could be easily "explained away" by simply attaching them to practices which were, at best, superficially understood and merely tolerated. Such was the case in the following excerpt from a book by Jacob Riis:

> They will tell you with a laugh at the Elizabeth Street Police Station that a few days ago when a dead goat had been reported lying on Pell Street it was mysteriously missing by the time the offal-cart came to take it away. It turned out that an Italian had carried it off in his sack to a wake or feast of some sort in one of the back alleys.[4]

Stereotyping by Perceived "Natural" Inclination: Exposition of "natural" inclinations, whether genetically heralded or manifested by the environment, were used to facilitate a writer's attempt to categorize an ethnic group. This practice was clearly seen in the following statements by Riis:

> Like the Chinese, the Italian is a born gambler. . . Ordinarily he is easily enough governed by authority--always excepting Sunday, when he settles down to a game of cards and lets loose all his bad passions.[5]

or again in the same source:

> . . . he soon reduces what he does find to his own level, if allowed to follow his natural bent. The process can be observed in the Italian tenements in Harlem (Little Italy), which, since their occupation by these people, have been gradually sinking to the slum level.[6]

Reinforcing this concept is Nelli, who points out in "Italians in Urban America", perceptions regarding ethnic predisposition.

> By the same process that many Americans believed Italians to be naturally criminal, contemporaries assumed that certain nationalities were predisposed to a particular occupation because of inborn traits or old world influences.[7]

Stereotyping by Illiteracy, Crime, and Delinquency: If the factors of Illiteracy, crime, and/or delinquency rate for a given geographic area happened to be high numerically, but not necessarily high in proportion to the general population, certain generalizations were easily drawn which cast aspersions on ethnic groups amounting to half-truths at best. This was seen in Wittke's:

> The South Italians were surpassed only by the Turks and Portuguese in illiteracy. Social life centered around the saloon, the cheap movie, and the dance hall, and the immigrant's most frequent contacts with Americans were through the saloonkeeper, the ward heeler, and the party boss seeking votes.[8]

Stereotyping by Derogatory Characterization: The most commonly encountered categorization, which touches upon several of the previously cited areas, was used by writers when personal glimpses or "thumbnail" sketches were warranted because of limitations of space or the lack of objective data upon which credible observations could have been based. These took form as in Riis':

> Red bandannas and yellow kerchiefs were everywhere; so is the Italian tongue, infinitely sweeter than the harsh gutterals of the Russian Jew around the corner. So are the 'ristorantes' of innumerable Pasquales; half of the people in 'the Bend' are christened Pasquale, or get the name in some other way. When the police do not know the name of an escaped murderer, they guess at Pasquale and send the name out on alarm; in nine cases out of ten it fits.[9]

The following examples emphasize the depths to which ethnic degradation can sink. The first, an excerpt from a newspaper:

> The flood gates are open. The bars are down. The sallyports are unguarded. The dam is washed away. The sewer is choked . . . (sic) the scum of immigration is viscerating upon our shores. The horde of $9.60 steerage slime is being siphoned upon us from Continental mud tanks.[10]

The second, an excerpt from a sociology text published at the turn of the century:

> Consequently, such extreme types as the Jews and Italians were educated in an almost identical manner. The nervous, flitting, uncertain little Italian received the same treatment as the steady, persevering, plodding little Jew.[11]

The third, from a religious periodical:

> They for the most part seem totally devoid of what may be termed the sense of respectability. . . The shame of being thought a pauper is almost unknown among the Italian people of this quarter.[12]

The fourth, from a caption in a commerically-sponsored picture book:

> Less than ten years ago, these quaint old houses on MacDougal Street were merely Italian tenements. They have now been reclaimed for more artistic purposes.[13]

and a fifth from Sartorio's text:

> Hard work, low wages, large families, tenement houses, poor food, and saloons tell the story of the maladjustment of the first and second generations.[14]

A seemingly positive style of patronization was also used as a degrading device, as was seen in:

> The Italians represented a stout-hearted, physically-fit peasantry, whose thrift and industry brought thousands unexpected success.[15]

and, more offensively, in:

> With all his conspicuous faults, the swarthy Italian immigrant has his redeeming traits. He is honest as he is hot-headed.
>
> The women are faithful wives and devoted mothers. Their vivid and picturesque costumes lend a tinge of color to the otherwise dull monotony of the slums they inhabit.
>
> The Italian is gay, lighthearted and, if his fur is not stroked the wrong way, inoffensive as a child.[16]

If each of the ethnic groups, races, etc., under consideration in a multicultural education course are looked at from the perspective of these stereotypic categories, a common approach toward dispelling the myths associated with each group could be established. Seminar participants, for example, could be asked to gather information and report the results to other members of the group using the categories as a framework toward establishing a thread of commonness which would serve to unite all people.

Integrative Approach

The broad general-education component of most institutions is well suited to satisfying multicultural curricular requirements. As stated in the NCATE Standard 2.1, a "multicultural dimension" in the curriculum is all that is specifically required. However, it should be understood that accrediting teams will be looking for specific objectives reflected in the elements of such a component.

For example, each course in distributive or core general-education requirements could be modified to include multicultural elements woven into its fabric. Such considerations as the contributions by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, religious, or political affiliations, persons with handicaps, persons with divergent personal characteristics or preferences, etc., to the respective fields of knowledge might serve as a starting point.

Of particular importance in implementing this model is the commitment of each faculty member involved in this enterprise to a concerted, well-coordinated effort in response to concisely stated behavioral objectives.

In addition to a high level of commitment, the issue of faculty expertise must be confronted. For, as stated in NCATE Standard 3.4, "The plan includes appropriate opportunities for developing and implementing innovations in multicultural education and for developing new areas of expertise."

This standard implies that it is the responsibility of each institution to provide for the re-training of the faculty where appropriate. Further, as stated earlier, being a member of a distinct ethnic and/or minority group does not in itself qualify a person to teach in such a program.

The establishment of team planning techniques, procedures for continuing professional development, and practices to insure on-going program evaluation are essential to the success of the program.

Conclusion

Initially it will appear that the implementation of a multicultural curricular component at our institutions is just another of a long series of hurdles to vault. However, if we bear in mind that the teachers we train will shortly be assuming the responsibility for establishing classroom environments which should enable each of their students to actively engage in cross-cultural interaction and communication, our task will be seen as essential to the success of our society.

Each institution must individually decide not whether to proceed but how to proceed in this matter. Unique institutional characteristics may dictate the avenue which might be taken in confronting the problem but it cannot be overemphasized that the foundation of an effective multicultural teacher education program rests on institutional commitment.

Without the support and commitment of the entire institution, there is little likelihood that a successful program consistent with the principles of multiculturalism can be established.

Footnotes

[1]Richard L. James, "Multicultural Education: NCATE Standard Rationale" in Journal of Teacher Education (Washington, D.C.: AACTE, January - February, 1978), p. 13.

[2]James, p. 14.

[3]Herbert I. London, "The Politics of the Core Curriculum" in Change (New Rochelle, New York: The Council on Learning, September, 1978), pp. 11 + 62.

[4]Carl Wittke, We Who Built America (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940), p. 435.

[5]Jacob A. Riis, How The Other Half Lives (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), p. 58.

[6]Riis, p. 52.

[7]Riis, p. 48.

[8]Humbert S. Nelli. "Italians In Urban America" in Silvano M. Tomasi, The Italian Experience In The United States (Staten Island, New York: The Center for Migration Studies, 1970), p. 100.

[9]Wittke, p. 439.

[10]Riis, p. 60.

[11]Newspaper excerpt cited by Robert F. Foerster, The Italian Emigration of our Times (Cambridge: 1919) in Wittke, op. cit. p. 440.

[12]Thomas J. Jones, The Sociology of a New York City Block (New York: Columbia University Press, 1904), pp. 127-128.

[13]Bernard J. Lynch, "The Italian in New York", The Catholic World (Volume XLVII, April, 1888), p. 68.

[14]Caption from a photograph in New York in 1923, The New York Edison Company (New York: The Marchbanks Press, 1923).

[15]Enrico Sartorio, Social and Religious Life of Italians in America (Boston, 1918) as cited in Tomasi, op. cit.

[16]Antonio Stella, Some Aspects of Italian Immigration to the United States (New York, 1924), p. 38.

[17]Riis, p. 53.